
GOVERNOR'S COMMISSION ON STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY



The Governor's Commission on Strengthening Democracy was established in January of 2009 by former Utah Governor Jon Huntsman, Jr. and subsequently endorsed by his successor, Governor Gary Herbert. The Commission was a response to a worrying trend. Utah has historically boasted robust voter turnout, but Utahns are now less likely to cast a ballot than citizens of 47 other states. The Commission was tasked with recommending revisions to Utah's campaign finance, lobbying, and election laws that would bolster political participation in the state.

The Commission, led by Hinckley Institute of Politics Director Kirk Jowers, comprised a diverse group of respected community and political leaders from across the political spectrum. The Commission actively sought public input and participation, and all Commission documents, meeting minutes, and research are available to the public on the Commission Web site (www.strengthendemocracy.org). The Commission held 12 meetings between February and December around the state. Hinckley Institute staff and interns played a vital role in the success of the Commission. Hinckley alumnus Matthew Sanderson served as Chief of Staff and General Counsel and Hinckley Institute Washington, D.C., Program Manager Taylor Morgan served as Senior Staff on the Commission.

The Commission recommended landmark reforms. One such recommendation would, if enacted, cap campaign contributions and impose "pay-to-play" restrictions for the first time in Utah's history, and provide for more robust public disclosure of political fundraising and spending in the state. To enforce these and other newly proposed requirements, the Commission also endorsed a new and independent Elections, Campaign Finance, and Lobbying Enforcement Commission headed by three retired judges.

In an effort to make voting more accessible to all Utahns, the Commission advised changes in state law to allow Utahns to register to vote when casting a ballot on Election Day, completing state government forms, and visiting government Web sites. This recommendation would also make voter registrations "portable," so that Utahns would not need to re-register after changing residences, as is now required. The Commission's other important recommendations included measures to improve Armed Service members' ability to vote, enhance transparency in government, and slow the legislator-to-lobbyist "revolving door."

Utahns demand and deserve a government that works for the benefit of all and inspires its citizens to serve their community, state, and country, Jowers commented. "Together we can create a stronger, more vibrant Utah, with greater participation by Utah's citizens and more transparency and accountability from Utah's elected officials," he said.